

Gods and Monsters by reverse-swing

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Summary: "And stood there, surrounded by a graveyard of fall leaves, Steve Harrington thinks he's finally figured out all there is to know about God's and Monsters." Comprises parts of S1,S2 and some post S2 concepts. Mainly Stancy and Steve/Dustin. Canon compliant. Series of one shots.

1. Chapter 1

He's been brought up to believe in God's and Monsters. But he's never truly considered what either means, not properly at least, not beyond shadowy shapes under the bed and hymns at long forgotten christenings.

But now he thinks about it, really gives it some proper thought, he figures that in a way they're the same, they both need a solid belief. And that's the bit that jars with him, the thing he can't wrap his head around.

The belief.

Something tangible, like bone, something pliable, like flesh, something to provide validation, like blood.

And sometimes lying awake in the dark, bathed in a silvery, black sea cast by the moon, he feels as though someone must have sliced a chunk out of him and drained away all the good, leaving the bad to fill in the hollow crevices.

But then he meets Nancy Wheeler and the whole world goes out of kilter.

...

It sounds like a goddamn cliché, it really fucking does, so even when he's telling Tommy and Carol why they're wrong about Nancy and why they need to shut their miserable mouths, he can feel an odd sort of push and pull ripping through him, a strange visceral tear, slashing at the canvas of everything that he thought he knew.

And they stop and stare at him like he's gone insane.

Maybe he has. But what's so great about being normal anyway?

...

He's waiting in the car for Dustin, wondering if the kid's quiff managed to hold up for the duration of the ball, but he doesn't shift

his gaze to the panel of glass in the auditorium door.

He tells himself there's no need, after all, Dustin will be out shortly. But more importantly, that it's *nothing* to do with Nancy Wheeler and her potential *companion*.

And then he barks out a laugh at the injustice of it all. It reverberates around the car sounding tinny and hollow, almost as if it doesn't belong to him and perhaps it doesn't in a way.

You won the battle, but you lost the war Harrington.

He flicks the radio on, but all he gets is static and he's no longer sure if the tapping he can hear is his foot or his brain.

He glances down at his watch (still not the door, there's no need). Dustin is fifteen minutes late.

Fuck.

He slides out of the car, a fall breeze slicing at him and he spots Eleven and Mike and the new kid Max. They wave at him and he nods back. And then his eyes shift past them, until they land on Dustin. He's grinning at Steve, sorta gummy and proud, hair seemingly having survived the course of the evening.

He gives Steve a thumbs up and just as he's about to respond, Nancy wheeler drifts out of the shadows as if she's some sort of spectre.

She ruffles Dustin's hair and he squirms free, still looking utterly thrilled and she smiles at the kid in a way that makes Steve's chest feel tight, as breath seems to catch in his throat, before scissoring its way out.

He toys with the idea of calling out to her, or at least jogging up to her, making small talk, just being *okay*. And maybe that will make him feel less like shit and maybe it won't.

But then....*Jonathan fucking Byers*. Camera slung around his neck, the one that Steve himself had picked out as an apology.

The pair walk off, hand in hand, back inside the hall.

And stood there, surrounded by a graveyard of fall leaves, Steve Harrington thinks he's finally figured out all there is to know about God's and Monsters.

Because Nancy Wheeler is both.

2. Chapter 2

Dustin is always the first to bring up the subject of monsters and sometimes Steve thinks that's because he only views them in the context of the Upside Down, something alien and disgusting, not borne of human DNA. But Steve knows better.

Maybe.

'Where do you keep the bat?' Dustin asks him over chilli fries one day (it's hard to be specific about days and times lately, but Steve doesn't like to dwell on why).

'Whaddya mean?' Steve says, leaning back in the booth, grinning in the way that Dustin likes best, that makes him less high school jock and more the guy that helped him defeat monsters- his *friend*... although neither of them have ever said this out loud.

'I mean, dummy, where do you keep it? You don't just leave it lying around your bedroom do you?'

Steve shrugs, 'not a big deal is it?'

Dustin's eyes widen in disbelief. 'But you beat the demadog with it....*twice*, it's like priceless or something.'

Steve laughs. 'I tell you what kid, when I die, you can have it, deal?'

And Dustin grins. 'Spit swear?' he says after a couple of seconds.

'Dude no, gross,' Steve says shaking his head. 'You're just gonna have to take my word for it.'

And actually, Dustin is pretty okay with that.

...

Sometimes, Steve likes to sit by the pool with a full deck of Lucky Strikes, watching the smoke unfurl and catch on a breeze, dissipating into the ungodly sky.

He's taken to guessing precisely where Barb might have come to her grizzly demise and in an odd way, it makes him feel closer to Nancy, especially when he's alone, which seems to be more often than not these days. After all, if he's being *really* honest, that night was the last time they were truly happy, unburdened in a way that only teenagers can be.

Before the world around them came tumbling down.

Brick-by-brick.

Other times he doesn't bother with the pool, he just carves out a haphazard trail through the forest, playing a game of hide and seek with the moon, as it disappears in and out of vision, momentarily lost under the patchy canopy of trees, only half caring that he may not find his way back.

But he always seems to somehow. Maybe he's just programmed that way?

...

His parents (well his mother mainly, when she can manage to stay in town for more than a week) ask him perfunctory questions, straight out of parenting 101. And they all blend into one ubiquitous blur, one that he responds to with the same answer-*everything's good*.

And it seems to satisfy them, enough not to probe any further.

In the main, this suits Steve just fine, but sometimes, when he remembers what Joyce Byers is like with Will and Jonathan, it stings a tiny bit. But he shuts it down before it begins to bloom into something more, something that spreads across his chest, making his breath feel tight.

Because that's just life right? Some kids get Joyce Byers and some kids get....he never can quite finish the sentence.

...

The new kid, Max, is throwing a birthday party and Dustin asks Steve if he can help him choose a new shirt to wear to it.

'You still got a thing for her, huh?' Steve says, fiddling with the tape deck in his car.

'It's not like that,' Dustin says, so quickly that the words almost slam into one another. 'I just mean...well she likes Lucas...and he's my friend.'

Steve nods, 'well, you're a *good* friend and maybe there'll be some other girls at the party.'

'You think they'll wanna talk to me?' Dustin says, suddenly more animated, sitting a little more upright.

'Sure, especially in the killer threads we're gonna find for you.'

Dustin likes it when Steve refers to them as a package (we're, us, you and me) it makes him feel less self-conscious about his lisp and crazy hair...after all, how many kids his age can say they're friends with Steve Harrington, 'it' boy of Hawkins High and chief demadog destroyer.

'Hey Steve,' Dustin says, just as Echo and the Bunnymen warn them about the Killing Moon.

'Yeah?'

'I think Nancy will change her mind.'

It's a lie, they both know that, but it makes Steve smile all the same-a genuine toothy grin. 'She's only human, right kid?'

Dustin nods, 'of course,' and he's smiling too.

And suddenly, things don't seem all that bad.

3. Chapter 3

Nancy asks him to Thanksgiving dinner, as he's stood by the lockers at school. It's been a week since they destroyed the shadow monster (for the second time) and they've barely spoken, just a nod of recognition as they drift past each other in hallways, like the ghosts of Christmas past.

For a minute, Steve isn't quite sure what to say, awkwardly shuffling from foot to foot, allowing a glorious exuberance to rip through him, as if he's swallowed a sunbeam.

'That's really thoughtful Nance,' he finally says, imagining what this means. Maybe, since vanquishing the inter-dimensional monster, she's realised Jonathan Byers isn't all that interesting, that they don't have anything in common- or any number of other scenarios, in which Steve Harrington is crowned the victor.

But then she says five words that splinter the conversation irreparably. 'My mom said to ask.' She clutches the folder she's holding even tighter to her chest, as if it's some sort of shield, like she knows she's just pulled the pin out of a hand grenade and is waiting for the shrapnel to come flying her way.

'Your mom?' Steve says, knowing how dumb he must sound.

Nancy nods. 'She heard your parents were out of town and after everything...well she just thought you might like some company.' She smiles weakly and it makes Steve's heart feel like a bruised, useless thing.

'Oh,' he replies, not sure what else to say, imagining sitting across the table from Nancy and Jonathan, as they all shovel turkey into their mouths and tell Mrs Wheeler what a great cook she is.

And then, as if she can guess the reason for his hesitation (it isn't that hard really) she says, 'Jonathan won't be there, he wanted to spend the day with his mom and Will, because of....'

'Yeah I get it,' Steve interrupts, the words sounding a little more

barbed than he had intended them to.

He supposes it should make him feel better that Byers won't be there, snapping pictures of the day. He imagines the pair, holding hands surreptitiously under the dinner table and it makes his gut contort in a way that even *ten* demadogs couldn't.

'So, what should I tell her?' Nancy asks, fiddling with the pendant on her necklace.

Steve idly wonders if it's a gift from Jonathan. Thrift store tat, made to look like some long lost family heirloom. Something that would make your neck go green if you wore it in the shower too often.

His own bitterness takes him a little by surprise-not the existence of it, but rather the vehemence. He bites the inside of his cheek to distract himself. And it works.

For *now*.

'Tell her thanks,' he finally says, 'but my mom is back the day before Thanksgiving, so I'll be fine.'

It's a complete lie and he doesn't even bother to make it sound convincing. But if Nancy has figured he's being less than honest, she doesn't let on. She just nods and says, 'okay, see you later,' before wandering down the corridor and disappearing into her afternoon math class (he wishes he didn't still remember her timetable).

When he thinks about it a minute or two later, still rooted to the spot, her lack of discernible emotion hurts the most. That maybe she doesn't care enough to pull him up on the lie.

He slams the locker door shut and leans against it closing his eyes, his breath suddenly feeling ragged.

'Steve?'

At first he thinks he's imagining it, hearing her voice again, like the old Nancy, softer, without filter. But it *is* her standing in front of him.

'Yeah?' he says.

'I know you said you're busy on Thanksgiving, but it would be nice if you came by, even if it was just for a little while....maybe we can save you a place at the table, just in case?'

And then she smiles and Steve Harrington can't remember what he was even objecting to in the first place.

'Sure Nance,' he says, as easy as that. 'Sounds good.'